Methods

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Methods

by TigerPrawn

Summary

Sequel to Consequences For My Soul

Another year has passed and Will is still struggling to come to terms with who he has become. His bond with Hannibal is the key, if only he'd stop fighting it.

Notes

In many ways this fic for me is reflective of something I personally had to learn. I am not trying to be dismissive of mental health concerns, this is a soulmark fiction and so please allow for it to be fiction not a true representation of mental health in the real world. That said, what Will is experiencing – the reasons for his own personal issues – resolve, though not easily, once he starts to accept himself. This may not be everyone's mental health journey and so I hope no one takes offence. But in this fiction it is Will's and in some ways it is mine.

Chapter 1

Will was unable to move. He had woken trapped and it took him a moment, one as long as three deep breaths, to centre himself. To realise that he was not trapped, he was held.

Hannibal's arms encircled him, holding him tight against his chest, a mat of soft down to Will's back. And Will allowed himself to melt back into that body. Hannibal never asks anything of him, never asks for more than Will is able to give and yet he gives Will everything he asks for. And he asks for this so often now, to be held and grounded. It made things easier. Life became easier once he found a way to ask for it. Which was not asking at all, but Hannibal knowing and doing. When had they even started sharing his room permanently? He wasn't sure. The days bled together so much. Some good, some bad.

The good days were special. Hannibal made them special. When he woke feeling lighter and less weighted with their reality, Hannibal knew immediately. Would pack a lunch and take him out. Fishing, hiking. Something that Will, on a bad day, would not be able to do and would be worse for it. On good days he had a hard time seeing the demon in Hannibal Lecter. Seeing his own reflected demon. And that was how he was able to go on. He had been shackled to a monster inside and Hannibal was a constant reminder of that, but could also be the comfort he needed to get him through it. If he allowed.

On the good days they would sit by the river and eat their amazing lunch. Even the food tasted better on days like this. Despite Hannibal's culinary skills the food would often turn to ash in Will's mouth on bad days. So he would savour those picnics. He would find himself laid out under the shade of a tree on a picnic blanket, listening to the river - sometimes side by side with Hannibal; sometimes holding his hand; sometimes holding each other. Sometimes he wanted to kiss Hannibal, but he never had and was sure he might never act on it. It would be too confusing. And just as he had let go of the idea of suicide because he couldn't leave Hannibal to go on with no soulmate as he saw Molly had had to, he wanted to maintain this status quo that appeared to be working. Of course it was not shocking that he had feelings and desires for his soulmate, but coming to admit them to himself had been one thing. Admitting them to Hannibal was not something Will felt he would ever be able to do.

Yesterday had been a good day. One of the best in a while. They had taken the boat and fished off the coast. They cooked the catch together in the kitchen that Will usually thought of as Hannibal's domain. On the worst days he wouldn't be able to eat from that thought alone even if he had the appetite to do so. But on good days that room was an extension of the comfort and care Hannibal gave him.

As Hannibal washed the dishes after their meal Will moved to his side and pressed against him. Hannibal leaned back into the half embrace and Will felt him belatedly attempt to stifle a comforted sigh. Will knew Hannibal hated to show even involuntary signs of how he felt about Will, not wanting him to feel pressured into reciprocating in any way. Or even awkward at the thought of it. Hannibal had told him from the beginning, from the moment they were healed enough to discuss such things - that if he could let Will go, free him if the bond allowed such things then he would.

He never said it aloud but Will knew Hannibal was in love with him, and to that end would do anything for him even if it meant setting him free if it were in his power. Will had never sunk low enough to ask and ascertain whether, to that end, Hannibal would have helped him die if he had asked back when he felt that way. Even on his worst days he could never have asked that of Hannibal. And in truth, with the passing of each good day, he didn't want to die. Those thoughts, whilst they sometimes reared as a background noise when he was not doing so well, were not as consuming or forthright as they had been. Each good day he was finding new things to live for.

Most of those new things were in some small way or other, Hannibal.

He was aware enough to try and curb this, to not let his state of mind rely on another and foster an unhealthy co-dependency, but it was different when it was your bond mate. That co-dependency already existed, whether it was nurtured or not. Sometimes it was easier to give into that and be held.

He lay in Hannibal's arms, soft breath against the back of his neck bringing him a comfort he hated to admit. He feels loved and safe and good and has to muse at how rarely he saw the demon now, though really he knew that it was just so familiar now as to go unnoticed. It was in there, beating at him and trying to bring him down or trying to claw out and unite with its partner inside Hannibal. Some days it was so hard, so exhausting to keep it contained. Like that day - burned into his mind - when he killed on the bluff. When they killed together and for one brief beautiful and horrifying moment, he had admitted to himself and to Hannibal that it really as truly beautiful. Almost two years ago, and every kill since when he was no longer able to contain his demon, reminded him of what he could not live with.

No. It was exactly two years ago. He realised, as a cold chill ran through him, it was the anniversary of that event. Of that one and only time he had allowed himself to enjoy who he truly was – if fate were to be believed. The thought made him ache in a way he could never quite discern.

He felt Hannibal stir beside him, and as sometimes happened before the man woke and realised his surroundings, a hand move absentmindedly over Will. First his hip and then lightly up to his chest to pull him close and breathe him in. Hannibal would wake and release him and apologise for the unconscious action. But today the movement made Will shudder and he shied from Hannibal's hand. As a hand reached his chest he pushed himself from the bed and stood in the cold, bleak room, shivering.

The movement startled Hannibal to full wakefulness. He looked at Will first with confusion and then complete understanding. It was going to be a bad day.

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In truth, Hannibal had hoped the anniversary would go unnoticed. The previous year it had not, it had been hard. Will had disappeared for three days and returned covered in blood that wasn't all his own. He had been sick from the separation but had fought Hannibal's caregiving and his recovery had been long and arduous for them both, though Hannibal would never have allowed Will to know the effect it had on him.

It had been the last time Will had tried to run, and in the year that had followed Hannibal felt that they had reached an understanding. He understood that Will was not willing to accept his true nature, and Will understood that he was bound to a monster. That their demons were bound together. Maybe Will knew, as Hannibal did, that they would never fully be happy unless Will accepted himself and accepted their bond. For his part, Hannibal hid his own unhappiness. Not on a par with Will's, it was nonetheless hard to live with the constant rejection - the knowledge of being so wholly reviled but your other half, by the one who completed your soul.

On the good days he would take what he could and laugh at himself, pity the needy creature he had become, happy to take the scraps of Will's affection when he deigned to bestow them. It reminded him of the orphanage. So long ago now, a different life, and different person - taking what he could get when offered, eking out what little he did have. As he eked out Will's affections and hoped that they would get him through the bad days.

On the bad days he would leave Will be, as Will wanted in the main. He would let Will go, as he invariably disappeared. There were so many grey mediocre days, not good, but not bad when they just seemed to exist in rotation around each other, as the moon to the earth. As he lived as Will's shadow.

The bad days were marked with blood. Will would go and kill, sometimes return in need of help to cover up his crime. Sometimes return and remain apart from Hannibal for days, sometimes return and require comfort - to be held. To pull out Hannibal's heart in his hands and squeeze the life from it as he had some other - a surrogate he wondered. Were all of Will's kills really Hannibal? He was unsure. On some of his own low days - for they were unavoidable - he believed they were. Even if they were not it was something Will would not share, they would never hunt together again, instead he would offer Will comfort and be used for it. He hated himself for not being angry at being used in such a way, at accepting it and wanting it. Needing it. He hated himself because he could never hate Will.

He stayed on the bed as Will began to pace. His own bed, where Will had joined him because he had wanted to. He had to remind himself of that, that Will would choose this closeness and comfort. On good days especially, Will understandably didn't want the good feeling to end and so would silently get up and go to Hannibal's bed when Hannibal himself went to bed. He was never surprised by the shadow that followed him and settled in his bed, he wished it were more than a shadow at times, that it were wholly Will. They seemed to both exist as nothing more than shadows.

Even so, it was enough for him, even if it would never be enough for Will. If he could never be enough.

His heart felt heavy and he wanted, as always, to reach out but that was not what Will would want in this moment, he had learned. He had learned the ways of living around Will. He knew, unhealthy as it was, that he was losing himself to Will. To be only what Will needed and never think of himself. He knew he was being dramatic to think it, but there was a truth there - his days built around Will's moods, around Will's needs.

He allowed Will his space to process what he needed, waited to see if Will needed him in any way but knew if he did it would not be for comfort. No, it would be, at times like these, as a

release of his anger. So he waited in silence until Will finally broke -

“Why didn’t you tell me? Remind me?” He had stopped pacing and glared darkly at Hannibal. “You knew didn’t you?” He stabbed a finger in Hannibal’s direction but he knew it would do no good to try and reason with him. He had remembered, of course. He knew the date exactly, but what good would it have done to tell Will? At the most it would have taken that one good day from them. He would not do that to Will and was aware enough of his own selfishness to not do it to himself either. He would not rob himself.

He did what he knew was best, he remained silent until Will stalked off. He released the breath he had been holding when he heard the front door slam.

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

Will tries to explore other options.

Will did not return that day or night. Not until the next morning. And not immediately to the house. Hannibal saw that the car had been returned to the driveway and that the lantern in Will's workshop had been lit. He knew if he went into the yard he'd be able to hear Will tinkering with a motor or cleaning his tools and workstation. He did not venture there - to Will's domain - even as he allowed himself a grin at the thought that no place of Hannibal's was sacred. Will wandered freely into Hannibal's bedroom and study despite having his own spaces. But how could Hannibal deny him? He only went into those places seeking Hannibal out and he would never turn Will away.

He rose and readied himself for the day slowly, perhaps cautiously. He was never sure what version of Will would return to him after such nights. Less frequent now was the self-destructive Will that attempted to provoke him. Usually it was the calm, sated Will who would slowly integrate himself back into their daily lives, though shrouded in the unease he carried with him from the actions he could not accept.

He made a light, cold brunch of bread and meat and left it on the counter near the backdoor where Will would find it when he returned to the house.

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Will was in the workshop for hours before he returned to the house. Longer than he ever had been before. He could see through the window, in the late afternoon, Hannibal moving around the kitchen. The man appeared to take a plate from the back counter and replace it with a fresh one. A late lunch or early dinner. Either way the gesture, unknowingly observed, caused his mouth first to twitch and then his eye, before he scrubbed a hand roughly over his face.

They had grown closer by the necessity of living so closely. But it was more than that, Will knew he had to admit. When he could ignore the monster in the man, when he had those good days, he enjoyed his company. Even when he was low he found comfort in the man.

He was aware how he treated Hannibal when he was having a bad day, but it was a compulsion he couldn't help and an anger he never seemed able to calm. Hours of tinkering and thinking had brought him back to himself enough to know that, though he'd likely never acknowledge it, Hannibal had been right not to tell him what the date was. It was always going to be a bad day, but it had been worse than Will had thought it might be, in a way he'd never imagined.

He had gone into the city with his list. The one he had prepared months before when he knew he needed to be less erratic, more in control and careful. A list of people no one would miss and where he might find them - the likes of his victim the night before. A scrawny, weasely little man known to Will as Hammond, though he had the police records of his many aliases. They had never managed to keep him despite the many acts of violence he had practiced on the city's prostitutes who were too afraid of losing business to report him. He had killed at least 4 that Will was aware of, that the police had not enough evidence for.

He had found the man leaving his employment and trailed him for hours until he finally picked up a girl and drove into an alley. Secluded enough for whatever he wanted to do to her. Secluded enough for Will. He had pulled the girl from the car and given her the cash he had stuffed ready into his pocket, told her to leave. She had, quickly, no one ever argued with him. With whatever it was they saw in his face. The same as the monster he saw in Hannibal, he knew. It angered him.

Hammond was on the receiving end of that anger last night. His blood remained ingrained in the skin of Will's fingers, under his nails. All beneath grease and engine oil now.

A killing like any other he had perpetrated. Carried out, concealed. Felt deep in his bones. First the anger, then the realisation and the horror. The disgust and self-hatred. And yet, that wasn't the case. He had ignored it at first, perhaps it was because he truly felt his victims deserved to die, but there was a little less disgust each time, sometimes he doubted he'd felt it at all. Instead there was something else he knew he shouldn't feel and attempted to ignore - a mixture of satisfaction and regret.

It was a long while, longer with each kill, before the sickness and anger hit him. The delayed disgust at himself that he wanted to hide from in Hannibal's arms but would resist as long as he could. He could stop this, he knew. He could not do this anymore, not kill. But in the time before the disgust set in, he found himself considering why he didn't stop. That if he tried he might be able to, but if he did would he still be able to return and find comfort from Hannibal. He spent the day contemplating the meaning of the regret he had felt and watching Hannibal move around their home from afar.

Their home. For them and their demons. The thought was digestible, for the first time. What Will couldn't let himself consider, what he had been trying to ignore for some time, was the reprieve the kill had brought him. The way that every kill bought him less bad days.

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It had been several weeks, three good days and one bad, since the second anniversary of their fall from the bluff. It was better. More grey days was better than nothing. Some days Hannibal could fool himself into thinking everything was fine, like it had been a few years ago before the bond became irreversible and they had been friends.

Will was at least changing for the better. When they had first dragged themselves from the ocean he had withdrawn, he had been unreachable. It had terrified Hannibal, how much he had regressed to a Will he first knew, a Will who was sick. He had spent weeks on edge in fear that the encephalitis would return, before he had finally accepted this was Will now. But now as the days seemed less fraught, it felt like Will was returning to himself.

Hannibal hadn't realised that perhaps Will was doing better than he had allowed, that he was growing more confident in himself and their uneasy alliance of a relationship. He hadn't thought Will would discuss things plainly and calmly, as he hadn't yet. So the day was marked by it being the first that Will asked a plain question, though he must already knew the answer.

He was sat in his study, comfortable reading in his armchair by the window in the afternoon light when Will walked in without knocking, as was his way. He waited for Hannibal to finish his sentence and look up to acknowledge him.

"You haven't killed have you? Since the… since we fell?" Will spoke with the words with no inflection or emotion. The vaguest hint of curiosity, as though he were trying to solve a riddle.

"I have not." Hannibal confirmed and waited for Will to continue.

He didn't.

Will gave a slight nod, turned and left the room. The conversation, such as it was, played on Hannibal for days. He dared not pry, he had learned in the past that to do so had a detrimental effect on Will and so on them both. He had not killed since the fall because his life had been consumed with caring for Will in one way or another whether the man realised it or not. Appreciated it or not. But further to that, he hadn't killed for fear of what it might do to Will, either his knowledge of Hannibal killing or any sort of sense of it he might get due to their bond connection. He was too fragile for Hannibal to dare try. Will was more important than his own needs and desires, so he did not even think about it, not any more.

He had mostly only considered his own lack of killing in juxtaposition to Will's need that regularly required sating. He took the brunt of Will's anger and blame even though he hadn't been killing and certainly hadn't influenced Will to kill since their fall. He continued to wait for Will to reach that realisation by himself and perhaps cease in his verbal attacks. But Hannibal knew that Will needed, perhaps even enjoyed, the way he treated Hannibal and for now that was how it would remain.

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Another bad day.

This time because of a kill.

It had started rather grey. Will had spent much of it in his workshop and then, in the late afternoon, went into the city for some screws he required in a certain size to fix up some more heavy duty shelves to put motor parts. It was a shitty part of town but the only place he knew stocked them.

It had been on his way back to his car that he heard someone behind him. It was getting dark and the area was quiet, the few shops now closing. Just the right circumstances for a mugging, he considered, a moment before he was knocked to the ground.

It had happened quickly, messily. In truth Will hadn't meant to kill, only to defend himself. But once he started to fight back he had been unable to restrain himself, and the mugger had been clearly unprepared for a man with his slight build being so capable of violence.

Will stood over the body, shaking, holding his hands in front of him and watching the blood there mingle - the now-victim's and his own from the broken flesh over his knuckles. He gasped for air and tried to reel in his mind. It hadn't happened like this in so long, he hadn't had to go to Hannibal for help with this in so long. He hated having to drag the man into it - he imagined him gloating each time, proud of and amused by the demon he had once sought to feed and release.

He could feel his face wet and didn't know if it was blood or tears. He pushed down his own horror, feeling the drive to be practical if only not to involve Hannibal as he'd had to so often in the beginning. He took a steadying breath that did little to help, and began to drag the body towards his car.

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This happened so rarely now. Most of Will's kills were planned he knew, though Will had never told him the specifics. He had a system at least, a list perhaps or those he could kill when he felt the need overwhelm him. When he had his bad days. It had been longer than Hannibal could really remember that one of those bad days was instead caused by an impromptu killing as seemed to happen a lot when they first came here.

He knew something was wrong, something had changed perhaps, when Will returned to the house instead of taking his time and staying in the car or workshop first as he was want to do. Hannibal had hesitated before going to seek him out, and surprised to find him sitting on the floor, back against a bookcase, in his study.

"How do you do it?" Will choked out the words filled with sorrow. "How do you stop?" Tears rolled down his face and Hannibal was reminded of the Will he first met, sick and pliable -

Don't lie to me!

Hannibal frowned, unsure how he could help in this other than to tell the truth. "I don't know Will. It just… I don't need it. Not as much as I need-" He cut himself off, not wanting to say something that might upset Will further. He wanted to sit next to him and hold him but couldn't tell yet whether that would be ok, this wasn't how things usually were. Instead he just stepped a little closer, put himself within reach.

"I need you to teach me." Will said it once as fact and then repeated the words imploringly as he took hold of Hannibal's arm, gripping it hard enough to bruise - as though he were holding onto reality itself.

Whether he could teach him anything or not didn't matter, Hannibal could refuse Will nothing.

*

Will paced the room, Hannibal wondered that they didn't have a path worn in the thin carpet and then scalded himself for being so flip, even if not out loud. It was a distraction of course, a protection against the barb of Will's words that felt so much harder to cope with for coming much less frequently now.

The easy comfort they'd fallen into, living practically as housemates with separate time and interests, suited them both well enough. Will seemed better bit by bit and with that he appeared to need Hannibal less and less as well. Hannibal hesitated to admit to himself that perhaps he welcomed Will's next bad day in the hopes of being the comfort he sought at the end of it. It had been so long since her had been allowed to hold Will now that the thought made his bones ache.

"You said you would help me!" Will was more aggressive than usual too, which was almost hard to imagine. There had been vitriol before this, blame as usual. Will had actually calmed a little from a few minutes before, but it was as irrational as always.

"Perhaps this needs to be treated as an addiction Will, you need to accept it to be able to free yourself from it." Hannibal said, gently.

"Is that what you've done?" Will looked at him desperately but his tone was clipped.

"I never denied who I was. I was always this, and I always accepted it, since-"

"Mischa." The way Will said her name drew something from Hannibal. It wasn't the same reverence Hannibal said it with - when he said it. Perhaps twice he had ever spoken of her to Will. She was private and protected within him, she wasn't for others - not even Will. And so her name, spoken with less respect than he felt her due, snapped something within him.

"You, do not say her name." Hannibal was on his feet, anger coursing through him as he pushed his finger to Will's chest. So many times Will had sought to provoke him and now he had, finally if unwittingly. "I give you everything of myself, I take so little in return. You cannot have her."

He had not been this angry since long before their fall and never so at Will.

He knew on some level he was overreacting, but it was enough, it was too much. There was only so much he could do and so much he could sustain. He had thought he could do anything for Will, be everything he needed, but reality suddenly hit him. Their bond should help Will, but whilst he continued to refuse it and reject both Hannibal and himself, there was nothing to be done.

Hannibal couldn't say anymore for fear of what words he might let out, what thoughts had been festering that he had never allowed life. He stood and left his own bedroom. This time he was the one to leave and drive away.

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Hannibal returned in the late evening and went straight into the house. Will had wondered if he'd come to the workshop, as he did. A stupid thought, but then his brain was jumbled

today.

He wondered if Hannibal had killed. And if he had, would it have been because of Will? Maybe in place of Will? The thought should make him shudder with fear but instead it made him sad. A deep sadness tugging within him in the same way it did when he considered so many many months ago now what his suicide might do to his soulmate.

He tried to push the thought down, he didn't need it right now. He had that awful feeling within him, that one that meant his demon was stirring and in need. The feeling that had once made him want to die but now had perhaps become numb to. Was it depression or something more physical? Sometimes it felt like it were sentient and might tear, fully formed, from his body. Feast on his corpse and then be at large in the world. He pushed down the thought too, that so far Hannibal - who at times like these he held responsible for the demon's birth - was the only one able to tame it. Sometimes he wondered whether Hannibal had birthed it at all, perhaps he had only nurtured something already there

Will sighed, breath shaking out of his lungs. He imagined being held in the man's arms, looking down at their wrists with the matching marks that had made them destined to this fate. He imagined the calm that always came with that when he allowed it. For the longest time he had thought he was trapped, that there was no way out other than the most dire of resorts. Just the thought of the warm body beside him calmed him a little. Until he pushed it away, those thoughts lead to the want to accept this fate, and he knew that was something he couldn't allow - something he should not want - to accept his and Hannibal's demons both.

He let out a cry, not loud enough to be heard beyond the workshop, but enough to ring in his own ears. He would not accept this. He had decided. He had thought before he was not accepting it but he had been, surely, by allowing himself to kill. If this was an addiction as Hannibal had described, he would go cold turkey.

He tried to hold onto that thought even as his resolve wavered and he longed to study his list for a suitable victim. Until it wavered so much that he was screaming at himself in anger as he pulled against the chain he knew would not give, that tethered him to the heavy workbench.

Rage pulled through him and the demon within, his monster that longed to be free, clawed inside him and darkened his thoughts. This needed to end, he couldn't do this anymore. He couldn't do this for untold years on end.

He didn't realise how much he had been thrashing and screaming until he wrenched his shoulder and slumped against the workbench, exhausted and hoarse. His face was wet, his body shaking.

"Will? Dear god…" He felt hands lifting him then, trying to move him before Hannibal must have realised that he was restrained. He felt the chain being pulled at, a hesitation then as he imagined Hannibal was looking around for the key that he'd thrown, with little thought, across the workshop. And then he felt Hannibal lower himself to the floor and draw Will to him, hold him close.

"What on earth is this Will?" He asked though Will couldn't detect any anger there.

“Cold turkey.” Will managed to mutter before he allowed the closeness of his soulmate to lull him into a dreamless sleep.

Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

Can Will find it beautiful once more?

“Do you trust me Will?” Hannibal asked softly.

Will eyed him almost suspiciously and found himself asking the same question in his mind as it simultaneously ran through all the events that brought them to this point. “Do I have a choice?” Was as good an answer as he could manage.

Hannibal’s smile was weak but understanding. “I think we should try something, if you permit it?” Will remained quiet but inclined his head just slightly, so that Hannibal continued. “I think the next time you feel-” Hannibal was clearly choosing his words carefully “-the urge to hunt, I think you should allow yourself to follow that urge.”

He had not given into the urge the last few times and grew weaker, sick. Cold turkey and a slow deterioration, similar to that he had experienced each time he had tried to leave Hannibal and been pulled back by their bond. This was not as quick and efficient though, no, it was like a rot set into his bones and he wondered if, in time, it would kill him.

Perhaps Hannibal was concerned for Will’s wellbeing. For his own perhaps as his condition also relied in some way on Will’s. Selfish Hannibal. Selfish. Will went to protest immediately and was burning angry within moments. He thought Hannibal had changed a little, as he wasn’t killing anymore, but he still wanted to have Will commit these acts, maybe even on his behalf now. “You just want me to kill again! You just want to watch!” Will spat the words as his head spun, a sort of delirium that seemed to haunt him often now.

Hannibal’s shoulder slumped a little and the man remained silent. Infinite patience was perhaps nearing an end after all, Will considered, if that was what it had been. More likely it had been a long game Hannibal had been playing. But what happened then? There was only one way to end a bond, as Will well knew. He wondered for a moment what Hannibal might take - it seemed almost fitting that the man might eat his heart.

“I do not want anything that you do not.” Hannibal’s voice was quiet and steady. “You asked me how I control my urges, and it is quite simple - after Dolarhyde I knew I would never kill again unless you were at my side-”

“So you will join me and I will have the blood on your hands to deal with as well? No Hannibal, I will not-”

“You will listen to me.” Hannibal’s voice was raised. Not shouting, but commanding in a way Will wasn’t sure he’d ever heard before - at least not directed at him. Will clenched his jaw, unable to answer even if he wanted to - he had nothing to say in that moment. After a few beats of silence Hannibal continued at his regular level of speech. “I will accompany you, I will stop you, in any way that becomes necessary if that is what you wish. But I can do nothing to assist you as we are now, if we keep going as we are. This may not work either, but… I care about your happiness Will. I will do whatever I can.”

Hannibal was silent again, studying him, that way he had of trying to see what was below the surface. What he had glimpsed before but Will now tried his utmost to hide from him. After a few moments Hannibal turned, wordlessly, and left the room.

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The next bad day was a long time coming and Will sickened all the while.

Even so, he would rather believe that it was because he was better at controlling his urges, rather than face the truth. The more he lost himself to the kills the more time they bought him. And as time passed and this illness of his soul descended, he came to realise that the last before his self-imposed fast had been most satisfactory. The sort of satisfaction a vigilante might feel. He had removed a criminal from the streets. He had removed a criminal from the world. Try as he might to ignore it, there was a satisfaction there. He had saved lives with the FBI, he still saved lives. His methods were more direct. He didn’t want to consider which he preferred.

He could feel the need clawing at him. His mind no longer as sharp and clear in his sickenss but the same confusion and anger rose – was it his own need, his own desire? Was it Hannibal’s? Was this the bond? He had been sure, in the beginning, that this was the case. He had hated Hannibal for making him feel this way. He truly and absolutely had believed that it was only Hannibal’s blood lust that drove his own. On some level he knew it was unfair to blame the man for the bond, but he could blame him for who he was, for the demon within Hannibal that had birthed his own. Had he been bonded to someone else, perhaps Molly, perhaps someone he was yet to meet – these feelings and urges would never have existed within him. So was it the fault of fate then? Could fate be so entirely wrong?

But Hannibal no longer killed. Will had suspected as much for a while, and at first he had ignored the confirmation. If Hannibal was no longer killing, controlling his own urges, then surely he should be able to as well? The thought of it angered him – how easy everything was for Hannibal. A fresh hatred arose for him, only exacerbated by his new plan to help Will. A plan which Will had no choice but to accept, as the demon within him began to writhe and surge against the insides of his chest.

He practically prowled through the house until he found Hannibal in his study, reading by the window. He looked up as Will entered and Will knew what he must look like – a desperate man.

“Will?”

“We need to go.”

*

When he had first seen Will enter the study, his heart had beat irregular in his chest, settling into an increased rate. It was time. For what, he was still unsure. Hopefully for something. For a beginning or an end either way. Will couldn't keep going like this. They couldn't keep going like this.

He was still unsure what they would do. Would he stop Will? How much effort should he put into restraining the man when this was clearly what he needed? Was it though? If he saw Will kill again, objectively, not blinded by his own thundering pulse – would he see Will as he should be, or merely a shadow of himself as Will was want to insist was the truth?

He was still unsure as he drove them into the city – taking Will's guidance on his intended victim. Following directions until they were in a parking lot. Will had a clear idea of who this victim was – an accused rapist who had friends in the right places – where to find him, where to sit in wait. Hannibal said nothing, committed to his role as nothing more than Will's shadow instead, at least until he might need to be more. When Will got out of the car, he followed. When Will started across the parking lot, he stalked him in silence.

Will was agitated. Beyond anything he had allowed Hannibal to witness before. The sight brought feelings up in him that were difficult to ignore. He wanted to help Will, he did, but he also wanted to be selfish. He wanted that night on the bluff again. And again. He would never force it, never manipulate it. He never really had. He had pushed here and there, things Will considered offensive and intrusive puppetry but had been little more than guidance. Would Will always misconstrue him in such a way? He pushed the thoughts down. He loved Will. Yes, regardless of anything and perhaps he might still have loved him had they not been intended by fate for each other. He would do whatever was asked until Will was ready to ask for what was needed.

"Hey faggots. Are you seeing this Bill? Did you see that one, faggot soulmark. Makes me sick."

Hannibal turned and saw the two men lurking in the shadows. His own sleeves were rolled, Will had a longer shirt but his wrists were visible. As they had passed under the street lamp their matching marks would have been clear. It was not unique for soulmarks to match same sex couples, but that had never stopped the prejudice. A renewed prejudice in this disillusioned day and age. Anger burned within him and he knew what his own actions might be towards someone so rude, but this was for Will to decide this night. He looked at Will and saw something break behind his eyes. His target, his victim, had changed.

"What of it!" Will snapped the words out at the man who had spoken, as Hannibal stood and watched.

"Oh, looks like we've got a prissy bitch right here." Both men began to laugh and make a show of cracking their knuckles. They had clearly been spoiling for a fight and must have thought they had found two easy marks.

In a blur, Will was on him – the man who had spoken, who had insulted the wrong person at the wrong time. They over balanced and Will went down on top of the man, his eyes burning,

the demon within him so clear that Hannibal wanted to reach out and touch it. Will reached into his back pocket and knife was in his hand, blade flicking out and catching the glare of the street light above. Will cried out as he slashed across the throat of the man, arms raised and face betraying his euphoria as blood sprayed over him. As black as it had been that night on the bluff.

It had happened so quick there would have been no way to stop Will as he had said he would, no way to anticipate his actions fast enough. Hannibal's chest swelled and his heart raced. Will's eyes shone, and his body shuddered.

"This Will, this is it. Don't you understand? This is what you need, accept it. Please, see the beauty in it as you once did." Desperation in his words. He only realised them as he said them and hoped Will might too. They needed to end this madness between them. He wondered if Will could even hear him as he sat, panting and shaking atop the man struggling to take his last breaths.

Previously frozen to the spot, the man's companion now cried out and made to move towards Will. Hannibal's own demon reared and answered in return. As the man passed him he gripped his shoulders and pulled him back. A brutal force he hadn't had to use in so long. He felt the power of it coarse through him. He caught the man before he could fully fall, latching his teeth into his neck and tearing the flesh there, his face partially catching the arterial spray as he now allowed the man to drop.

This was what he had wanted for them both, but would never have forced. He took a glance at Will, still caught in his moment of climax.

"Will." He held out his hand and knew that Will understood immediately. As the man hit the ground Will tossed his knife to Hannibal.

His knife. His method.

Hannibal caught it easily and followed the man down as he crashed, desperately grasping hands to throat, to the cold floor. Hannibal plunged the knife through his ribs and stopped the man's heart with a roar.

This was it, this is what Will needed, what he had hungered for and never understood.

Hannibal was panting, the blood on his face dripping onto his lips, he swiped some into his mouth with his tongue. A ringing in his ears – the adrenaline flowing through him – dissipated and he could hear his own panting matched with Wills. The man beneath Will still gurgled and Will looked powerful. Victorious.

He didn't look at Hannibal as he gave into something within him and took hold of the man by the head and shoulder, leaning in and ripping out his throat.

His teeth. His method.

Hannibal was unable to stop the strangled sound that bubbled up in his throat. This was Will. This was wholly him, the demon revealed and sitting as it should on the surface even if

Hannibal was the only one to see it. This was Will's true self.

Their methods.

Will turned to Hannibal then and gazed at him with something akin to wonder. He looked down at the blood on his hands and laughed. Not the hysterical laughter that might be borne from such an event, but a joyous heartfelt and warm thing of someone learning something they had thought would forever escape them.

Hannibal was hit by guilt then, a realisation so hard that it burned through him. The fault was only in part his because he could never have forced Will. But the answer was now clear to him. From the look, the wonder, on Will's face – it was clear to him too. Will hunting and killing alone had been destroying him as much as not killing at all. It had been hurting Hannibal too, in smaller, easier ways. Ways that were easy to ignore for a man who had lived his life. So easy that he had not considered their relevance until they had now, finally, become clear. He had been controlling himself without comprehension of the consequences.

He had been doing this to Will. This was his fault. Not in the ways Will had perhaps thought and countless times accused him of. No, their separation in the hunt was as dire as their separation altogether. They were both destined to this path for a reason. Fate had put them together for a reason. To complete each other, to complement each other in every way.

"Will." Hannibal breathed out his name on a gentle breath as the men beneath them drew their last.

Will looked over at him, his laughter had stopped but the smile on his face was that of a euphoric man. Perhaps Will had never found the power in it before. Perhaps he had never felt this way when killing, or when he did he had buried it or reviled it as with Dolarhyde – unwilling and unable to accept the truth of it when they had lived. That no longer seemed to be the case. It took a few minutes for the Will to catch his breath and finally stand, blood painted across his skin. Hannibal mirrored him, standing and closing the distance between them.

"These were not your intended victims Will." Hannibal pointed out, curious to see how Will would react – so meticulously he always planned what amounted to a vigilante action. Up until now, before he had seen the bliss that had shuddered through him, he might have presumed that Will would be inconsolable in his guilt. Instead there was a grin that never wavered.

"No, perhaps not." Will looked down and huffed a laugh. A confident Will, a self-possessed man Hannibal had not seen in so long that it ached to look upon him. "They were two bullies who picked the wrong fight with those they assumed to be weaker than them. With people they hated because of what not who they are." He shrugged.

Hannibal's heart skipped at that, more a thud, that knocked the wind out of him. This was the demon within Will, the one that had been waiting. That had been tearing apart the man in trying to get out. He finally understood, finally knew – it had been waiting for him. Had met him on the bluff and had been waiting for Hannibal to bring it the rest of the way out. From the awed look in Will's eyes, he knew the same to be true.

Will moved then, closing the space between them entirely and ghosting his lips over Hannibal's as he muttered "thank you." And then Will's mouth pressed to his and his whole body was alight, every nerve tingling. He tasted the blood on Will's lips.

*

The last time Will had felt this confident and alive he had been luring Hannibal into a trap. He had told himself at the time it was not the real him, he was a good fisherman. He wasn't truly thinking and feeling those things. The confidence was a show that Hannibal needed to see. A seduction. A coming together of soulmates. But he should have known, Hannibal could only see the truth of him and that had been the truth. The truth of his demon growing and raising its face to the light. Though he had fooled himself at the time, he knew now that it had been real, because it was real now.

It was hard to shed the life he had known, to accept this true self, but with each day it grew easier. With every month that passed he learned from Hannibal and embraced the man's demon as much as he had learned to embrace his own.

It had taken time and Will still preferred his rules, his safety net perhaps – it felt good to kill bad people. But they hunted together now. Rarely. Because it wasn't needed. The kill wasn't what the demon had truly hungered for. It had truly desired acceptance, of Will, of Hannibal, of their bond.

There was still work to do, healing required between them. Hannibal was supportive and rewarded with the growing desire Will had for an intimacy between them. Slow, gradual. Tentative at first with light kisses, gentle touches. Their souls had been bound together by fate, and he realised now it had been pointless to fight it. Because fate knew best, fate had picked for him the one person in the entire world who could love him, support him, *see* him.

Will had found it beautiful once, it had taken time, but he understood now he had just needed to accept fate and find it beautiful again.

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